Judea and Samaria are on fire – literally

written by David M. Weinberg | 05.07.2024

Reading the international press, and reading much of the overwhelmingly left-wing Israeli press, you inevitably get the impression that the threats to stability in Judea and Samaria stem from "settler violence" and settlement housing starts.

You wouldn't know, couldn't know much, about the real sources of instability – which are escalating Palestinian terrorism, surging illegal Palestinian construction in zones of strategic importance to Israel, and wildly out-of-control arson attacks.

The arson attacks in particular have become a central tool in the terrorist assault on Jewish life in Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank").

Here is a reminder of some basic facts.

Attacks on Palestinian property and individuals committed by a few extremists at the fringes of a half-million-person strong and overwhelmingly peaceful community of Israelis who live over the Green Line – calculates to a level of violence that is lower than the level of violence by Israelis against Israelis that afflicts greater Tel Aviv.

And without meaning to diminish the ugliness of extremist Israeli attacks on Palestinians (about 1,100 incidences of all types a year), harassment and vandalism by some angry settlers pales in comparison to more than 5,000 Palestinian bomb, car-ramming, knifing, and shooting attacks a year aimed at killing Israeli civilians in Judea and Samaria.

(And of course, this super-pales in comparison to the 1,200 Israelis slaughtered by Hamas on Oct. 7 or the reign of terror inflicted on all Israelis by the more than 20,000 rockets and missiles fired by Hamas into Israeli civilian population centers over the past half year.)

Everybody knows how Nablus and Jenin (and Tulkarm and Kalkilya and more) have become dens of hard-core, Iranian-supplied terrorist groups, requiring nightly interdiction raids by IDF commandos with heavy engineering and air

strike support. (So much for the Oslo Accords promise of a demilitarized Palestinian autonomous entity.)

THE THREAT of terrorist assault from the western Samaria seam line into central Israel is concrete, and already there have been scattered shootings over and through the security barrier into the Bat Hefer and Mount Gilboa areas.

Israel has been forced to eliminate 450 terrorists in Judea and Samaria this year in more than 60 brigade-level raids, and arrest 3,600 other terrorists or those suspected of terrorism. Some 8,000 Israeli troops, mostly reservists, have been stationed on regional defense missions in the area this past year.

As for housing starts, well there are about 4,000 Israeli "structures" (mobile homes, caravans, etc.) considered unapproved or illegal in Judea and Samaria.

This includes homes for which final residence permits are pending ("Tofes 4") or homes where a garage or additional room was built without permits. But note: 85% of these "structures" are inside the municipal boundaries (what is known as the "blue line") of recognized Jewish communities.

That leaves only some 500 structures that are, according to international critics of Israel, "changing the footprint of Jewish presence in Judea and Samaria." (Not a great showing for "Zionist expansionism," if you ask me.)

On the other hand, there are at least 90,000 defiantly built Palestinian homes that have cropped-up illegally in Area C of the West Bank in recent years, almost all of which can be considered strategic threats to Israel.

These structures are actively changing the map of Area C, purposefully placing Palestinians in areas that never before had an Arab presence, dividing the settlement blocs, encroaching on access routes (forcing the Israeli government to pave bypass roads to the bypass roads, which leads to accusations of land expropriation, etc.) – all in an attempt to prevent any future logical division of the territory into neighboring polities (for those who still believe in the wisdom of this).

A recent report by the Regavim Movement argues that illegal Palestinian construction seems designed to specifically conquer the Judea and Samaria security buffer zone, meaning the seam line adjacent to the security barrier that

Israel constructed mostly along the Green Line over two decades.

Regavim's mapping division has revealed three sample clusters of illegal construction: In the southern Hebron region in the vicinity of Ramadin, Dahariyeh and Eshkolot; in the Judea-Etzion region, south of Tarkumiyeh, Khirbet Khatta, Khirbet Adir, Sureif, Wadi Phukhin, Batir, Beit Iksa, Beit Laqya, Kfar Tzaffa and Na'alin; and in Samaria, in the northern and southern sections of IDF firing zone 203 near Kfar Thulth, north Tzofim, and a-Ras.

Regavim identified 7,675 illegal structures in these clusters, all within a one-kilometer radius of the separation barrier, all of them in Area C.

In the seamline buffer zone stretching from the northern tip of the Jordan Valley to Ein Gedi in the south, Regavim has mapped 16,866 additional illegal structures within a one-kilometer radius of security and border barriers.

Burning down Israeli farms

AND THEN there are the multiple brush and forest fires persistently being lit every day in Judea and Samaria by Palestinian terrorists in an attempt to literally smoke Israeli farmers, ranchers, and settlers out of the area.

Over the past months, firefighters have battled well over 1,000 fires in Judea and Samaria, many of them adjacent to Jewish towns and Israeli army bases, almost all of them certainly caused by arson.

This included difficult-to-control fires around the community of Peduel, on the western ridge of Samaria, and adjacent to Elon Moreh, an Israeli town of 2,000 people in the Samarian highlands; fires near Revava, Shavei Shomron, Karnei Shomron, Salit, Nahal Shiloh, Yitzhar, Givat Itamar, Tzur Harel, Oz Zion, and Kochav Hashachar; in Gush Etzion and the Jordan Valley; near the important IDF base on Mount Hazor near Ofra, near the Mount Kabir base above Nablus, and adjacent to the "Ofrit" base on Mount Scopus on the eastern ridges of Jerusalem.

And every single day, Palestinians and their extreme left-wing Israeli anarchist allies torch the grazing grounds of cattle in the central Binyamin and Samaria highlands where pioneering Israelis have established a string of some 100 ranches (in Hebrew: havot) – or as Western media and hostile NGOs call them,

“wildcat settler outposts.”

The grass and brush that grows in the vast and mostly unsettled parts of Binyamin and Samaria are “natural gold” for feeding these herds of cattle and flocks of sheep.

Burning the pastures is outright warfare, designed to firebomb Jewish “settler sheep” off the land and drive settlers from the area.

This is not too different from the devastation caused by thousands of incendiary balloons and kites sent over the Gaza border by Hamas since 2018, firebombs that destroyed tens of thousands of acres of nature reserves and farmland in southern Israel. (Experts say it will take years to rehabilitate the burned farm fields in southern Israel.)

But who cared about the Hamas fire balloon blitz, and who cares about the manifold arson assaults in Judea and Samaria? Who cares about the dangerous and illegal Palestinian building juggernaut along the seam line and other strategic zones? The first is long forgotten, the second grossly underreported, and third shrugged off (or even supported by the European Union).

And in the face of exaggerated reports of “settler violence” and crassly misreported stories of settler “land grabs” – well, the reality of Palestinian terrorist violence and belligerence does not stand a chance of grabbing anybody’s attention in Tel Aviv, Washington, or Brussels.

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